



Coherence and Contrasts

January 13, 2011 | COL (R) Charles D. Allen

On November 18, 2010, two late night television shows provided fanfare for two men from different ends of the leadership spectrum. One man's example epitomized tactical and direct-level leadership; the other was the definition of strategic leadership. To me, it came together while watching interviews that were less than 20 minutes apart. The Colbert Report featured Medal of Honor recipient Army Staff Sergeant (SSG) Salvatore Giunta, and The Tonight Show host Jay Leno spoke with former President George W. Bush. The reasons for the national spotlight could not have been more different but the two men are inextricably linked.

President Bush's appearance supported the release of his new book, *Decision Points*. In it, he related thoughts and reflections on 14 major decisions he made as the man who would lead the nation after the attacks of September 11, 2001. While being President is a very public position, we rarely get a glimpse into the mind of our most senior leaders when they are making strategic decisions that inevitably have such great consequence. By the very nature of the office, decisions are tied to domestic and international events in an inherently complex and uncertain environment. At that level, problems are many; solutions are rarely simple or easy.

One of President Bush's decisions provided the context for SSG Giunta's two combat tours in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan. It was during the second tour (15 months long) in October 2007 that then-Specialist Giunta's actions during an enemy ambush in the Korengal Valley set him apart. (See website).

SSG Giunta said during the Colbert interview that he did what he was trained to do in an ambush³ shoot and attack in the direction of enemy fire. What was a disciplined response to a tactical action was quickly overshadowed by his moving forward in the face of intense fire to care for what he thought to be a wounded comrade. If that were not enough, when he saw two enemy soldiers carrying away another of his teammates, Team leader Giunta pursued and recovered his fellow paratrooper. During the interview, sincere and humble, he attempted to downplay his individual role as he spoke of his team and unit. He also spoke about the sacrifices of other soldiers who “gave their tomorrows for our todays.”

In each interview, it was clear that both men accepted the responsibility to protect those who had been attacked. They were men of decision in precarious circumstances who did not shrink from or shirk their duties in the face of adversity.

History has already judged the tactical actions of SSG Giunta. Even that took 3 years. However, for President Bush, as is the case in matters of policy and strategy, it may take decades to determine the long-term consequences of his decisions.

While both men come from distinctly different backgrounds, both chose service to others demonstrating selflessness and offering personal sacrifice.

The Colbert Report is available from Colbert Nation.

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